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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Imagine....a new record season for tropical storms and hurricanes. We're still a month away from the end of the season, and we've already used up all of the available names, plus one. It's been one heckuva couple of months. The rain and wind this past week, along with the resulting destruction along the east coast, has been amazing. It just goes to show you how destructive nature really can be.

The weather being as it has these past few weeks has made a mess around here. We haven't been able to keep up with our seasonal fall clean-up; it's pretty tough clearing leaves and branches from the yard! Last weekend I managed to dodge the raindrops and get the lawn mowed (after three weekends of rain). The other good thing was our siding contractor finally decided that they had time to do our siding and gutter repair - after almost six months of waiting!

So, here we are, Halloween only days away. Turkey Day is rapidly approaching (visions of Dana & Joe smacking lips in anticipation!). So, now that I've completely got visions of turkey in my mind, I'd better get moving along. Remember to watch out for the little ghosts and goblins (and who knows what else!) roaming the streets on Monday!

Until next time...

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Hatari, Version 0.80

Version 0.80 of the Atari ST emulator Hatari has been released:

- Hatari now supports STE hardware emulation (including STE palette, STE shifter with horizontal fine scrolling and split screen effects, DMA sound and STE joypads).
- Hatari can now emulate up to 14 MiB ST RAM instead of only 4 MiB.
- Support for parallel port joysticks.
- Improved GEMDOS HD emulation (added Fattrib() call).

- Adding and removing a GEMDOS or ACSI hard disk should now work
  correctly.
- The screen conversion functions have been rewritten.
- Improved manual: Now with screenshots of the options dialogs.

URL: http://hatari.sourceforge.net/

EmuTOS, Version 0.8.1

EmuTOS version 0.8.1 has been released. EmuTOS is an open source replacement for the TOS image files that are needed for Atari ST emulators. This version mainly fixes some annoying bugs from the 0.8 release:

- Fixed stupid bug that prevented window dragging
- Fixed some unreadable dialog texts
- Fixed bug in GEMDOS Pterm function
- Implemented VDI calls vs_color and vq_color (for ST/STE)
- Finnish translation and keyboard mapping
- Support for swiss german keyboard mapping

URL: http://emutos.sourceforge.net/en/

AtarICQ 0.165 Is Released

Hi all,

This time the changes aren't that many, but I thought I better get a new version released before I start changing things that will require lots of time to finish :)

Go here to download the new version: http://www.ataricq.org

Recent changes:

* Added icons for 256 colour mode (Not all icons have 256 colour data)

* Changing online status can timeout now, if server is not responding. AtarICQ interprets this as if we lost the connection.

* The keep_alive call is reimplemented, and sent to the icq server once every 2 minutes. This may perhaps prevent aICQ from dropping the connection.

* In preferences for contact list, you can now decide whether you wish a selected contact to be indicated with a dotted box or by inverting the nick.

Have fun.

Regards,

/Joakim

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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CCAG Show Rescheduled

Show Rescheduled to December 4, 2005!

As some of you may be aware, we are allowed the use of the National Guard Armory in Lorain, Ohio because one of our committee members is a member of the National Guard. This allows us to hold this event very inexpensively and free to vendors and attendees. In order for us to hold CCAG at the National Guard Armory in Lorain, he must attend the event. Unfortunately, Hurricane Rita activated the National Guard unit that he is in which meant he was unavailable for the now previously scheduled event date of October 22, 2005.

We have rescheduled the show to December 4, 2005, and have announced it via our email mailing lists and on this website: http://ccagshow.com/

Again, we apologize for late change in plans but it simply couldn’t be helped. It’s just one of the non-monetary costs of a free show.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I don’t know about you, but I think that, instead of putting my money into CDs or Money Market funds, I’m going to squirrel it away in pharmaceutical and petroleum stocks.

Exxon/Mobil posted an almost 10 BILLION dollar profit this quarter. That’s three months, folks. Now, there are certain key times when a corporation makes a profit either despite or because of hard times. That, in and of itself, isn’t necessarily a bad thing.

My problem with the whole thing is that we’ve been paying these prices because someone told us that it was necessary. Now, granted that I’m not a economist, but it seems to me that there are really only two circumstances that should raise prices like we’ve seen: Either

increased costs to the supplier or a shortage of product. That old "supply and demand" chestnut.

While we've heard of the possibilities of shortages, we haven't seen any. That could mean that they're simply doing a terrific job of keeping ahead of demand, or it could mean that they're... ummm... well, sticking it to us. No matter which it turns out to be, there is one undeniable fact... the amount of energy we demand is growing at a faster rate than our resources are.

At any rate, we're all along for the ride, and I'm guessing it's going to get worse before it gets better.

Of course, if you live in a country other than the United States, you're probably chuckling and shaking your head right now, because you've been paying higher prices for gasoline/petrol for years. Take comfort in the fact that we're in the same boat now.

I'm going to warn you now... it's going to be a short column this week. There haven't been a huge number of posts, and I'm running out of things to rant about. <G>

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Ronald Hall asks about his CT60 and an RGB monitor:

"Hey gang. I was just wondering...doesn't the CT60 work with RGB (as in SC1224 monitors)?

Reason I'm asking is, I was playing with some older demos, seeing which ones still work and which ones don't. I was running at first with the CT60 turned *off*. Some demos work, some don't - so I can only assume its because of the motherboard mod thats done. Termfin runs, Beams runs, Hmm runs, but none of the Douglas Litte (of Black Scorpion fame) demos like Speeder work.

Anyway, I ran beams from ST low, no auto/acc/cpx stuff at all. It runs, and says it found no CT60, no Centurbo, no...well, you get the idea. It seems it detects some of these upgrades so I thought I'd boot up with the CT60 *on*, hooked up to an SC1224 monitor, in st-low, no auto/accs/cpxs and see what it would do.

Except that I can't even boot up. The screen goes garbled up color crazy and thats it. Nothing. Nada.

Am I missing (as per my usual practice <grin>) something obvious here?"

'Chris' tells Ronald:

"I had similar problems when I clocked the bus with nemesis years ago. Some games didn't work at all, the screen was just garbage and rolling like mad, worked fine on a unclocked falcon... actually got tired of it after a few games and ripped the thing out... I have CT60, and needless to say i've not boosted any buses up... only one that might be worth

doing is the dsp clock..... I just overall get the feeling that people haven’t tested these bus upgrades out properly as indeed it causes stuff to mess up... even know of some falcons which have been killed due to overclocking, seems the videl gives up or something like that.... i’m staying well clear of all that stuff now! not worth gaining a few mhz at the risk of killing a falcon!!!!!"

Ronald tells Chris:

"I had the Nemesis accelerator in my first Falcon. It was very compatible for me. All the demos, games, and apps that I used worked just
fine.

Don’t know what’s different about the motherboard mod for the CT60 but it is. About 1/3 of the demos I’ve tried so far don’t work (this is with the CT60 itself turned off). Some apps, such as Videomaster Falcon apparently as well. I can’t even boot up with an SC1224 monitor with the CT60 on and the motherboard mods, although I can boot up with the CT60 turned off. Are the motherboard mods active all the time, even with the CT60 turned off?

Since you don’t have the motherboard mod, can you tell me if you can play MP3s with the CT60 alone with Aniplayer? Just curious..."

Chris replies:

"I think its down to video modes used, IMHO when the bus is running 20/25mhz some screen modes refuse to work correctly. I know half the apps I used didn’t work so just gave up in the end.

I am pretty sure aniplayer works in CT60 mode, but I have never been able to solve my CT60 problems yet, I am lucky to get even to the desktop let alone running any apps. I’m waiting for the CTCM module, going to try underclocking the CT60 to like 40mhz and see if it runs more stable then... my falcon has been in bits for like 2 years now, even sent my falcon to rodolphe for testing and he said it works fine, I don’t see how as I can’t even get to the desktop without it crashing... ah well, old story now... hoping I can get some boost out of the CT60 so I can at least put the lid back on my falcon!

FWIW, I can’t play a mp3 in 030 mode, not very well, CPU flatlines and mp3 starts stuttering, I think in CT60 mode it uses about 50%... really can’t remember now, half given up tbh."

Rodolphe Czuba jumps in and tells Chris:

"I’m always disappointed to read such bad things!
If you sent me your mb + CT and I told you that it was running fine for me, you can be sure it was running fine...

NOW, you should think what are the peripherals you do not send me, because there is a big chance that one of these (the HDD and the software on it) is the problem!

When I receive mb + CT to test, I connect them on MY PSU and my HDD that contains a good version of HD Driver (7.60). My HDD is a Quantum

Fireball 3.2 GB.

Even if you do not boost the mb, you can get some HDD problems because of a HDD timing problem itself or a software driver problem !!
Think to that : HD Driver may run fine on 100% of HDD models on a 030 CPU and run on 95% of the HDD models with a so faster CPU like 060.
It is a timing problem (software timing, not hardware because MFP is the same !)."

Last week someone asked about changing the icon background color on the THING desktop. Someone recommended TeraDesk. Djordje Vukovic posts this:

"TeraDesk simply the AES function rsrc_load() to read the icons file and then uses objc_draw()/_add()/_change()/_hide()... to draw and manipulate them. So the most elegant way to provide transparent icon labels would be that an AES somehow provide that capability. Alternative code might be created to provide enhanced rendering of the icons, e.g. like transparent labels, or proper drawing of 'disabled' icons (nice for for hidden files), but probably that would be more trouble than it would be useful. On the other hand, if someone wishes to contribute a piece of very small (up to a couple of hundred bytes) and fast piece of icon-rendering code (treating icons as progdef'd objects), it may get included in TeraDesk...

A new release of TeraDesk (V3.63) can be expected in a couple of weeks or so-a number corrections has been made, some of which which may be considered more as improvements of the functionality of certain features. See new.txt on TeraDesk's home page.

I must admit that I do not understand this fascination with very long filenames ;) OK, the 8+3 of FAT filesystem is really very limiting, but extremely long names are boring to type, difficult to identify, and make directory listings almost unreadable. IMO about 10-20 characters should be enough- the useful content is supposed to be -in- the files, not in their names.

Btw. TeraDesk can handle filenames up to 128 characters long and complete paths can be up to 255 characters long, (but in some situations the complete path may be limited to about 130 characters).

Bbtw. it is possible to change maximum name/path length in TeraDesk by changing only three parameters in the source code- so a user should be able to easily recompile the program with this feature set to his liking (recently a user wished for filenames up to at least 1024 characters long...).

People have contacted me with very useful remarks about features which did not work as declared, or missing features which would be useful. Some of those suggestions have since been implemented in TeraDesk- so, if you have some specific objections, please let me know, and maybe something can be done about them."

Derrick Chapman asks for help with a hard drive:

"Hello all, can anyone help me? I have a 1 gig ex microsoft hard drive which I want to connect to my Atari 1040st. I can't find any software which will recognize the hard drive. Can any one tell me where I can

get icd software from?"

Ronald Hall tells Derrick:

"ICDs stuff is okay, but I'd heartily recommend Uwe Seimets' HDDriver software. Its commercial, but worth every single penny."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Derrick:

"In order to test if your drive is recognized the demo version (http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html) of HDDRIVER is sufficient. In case your drive is not recognized by the ID check of the HDDRUTIL tool the drive may not be jumpered correctly, or is not correctly terminated, or it requires a SCSI feature called Initiator Identification, which the ICD Link does not support."

Edward Baiz jumps in and adds his opinion:

"If you have the ICD Link 2, then I would get HDDriver. I have a Link2 in my STe and HDDriver works great with it."

Melvin Stoten asks:

"Which SyQuest SCSI parallel drives work with an Atari ST?"

Greg Goodwin tells Melvin:

"I don't know. However, the SyQuest EZ135 I own came with a parallel cable adapter that I don't use. What do you mean by "SCSI parallel"?"

Melvin replies:

"Although SyQuest SCSI drives are old tech, I am new to them. So, my understanding comes only from what I have been told. I may be wrong about using "parallel." What I need to find out is which SyQuest SCSI drives will work with a 1040ST with 4MB memory or a Mega 2. I now know from you that a SyQuest EZ135 will work. Thanks much."

Ronald Hall adds:

"Oh, you threw me off when you asked about parallel. :-)

I've got both the EZ135 and EZ200. They both work just fine."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Florida Goes After Violent Game Sales!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Slow Start for New Xbox?

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Florida Bill Aims to Curb Violent Video Game Sales

A Florida state senator has introduced a bill that would ban the sale or rental of violent video games to minors, an aide to the lawmaker said on Thursday.

Introduced on October 25 by state Sen. Alex Diaz de la Portilla, a Republican from Miami, the bill is a near clone of legislation recently signed into law by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger - Hollywood's "Terminator" - who is portrayed in several video games based on his action film roles.

Bills aimed at restricting sales of violent games to minors are the latest salvo in a long campaign by detractors and some parent groups to limit access to games with adult content.

Critics cite research suggesting that violent games can increase aggressive behavior in young boys. Game makers and retailers counter that video games carry ratings similar to those found on films, and many store clerks ask for identification from young gamers to make sure they are not buying titles aimed at older audiences.

The battle over controversial video game content flared anew this summer when game publisher Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. pulled its blockbuster title "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" from store shelves following the discovery of hidden sex scenes in its code.

Trade groups representing the $10 billion U.S. video game industry have sued to strike down the new California law and are fighting similar battles in Michigan and Illinois.

Courts already have blocked such legislation in Washington State, the city of Indianapolis and St. Louis County in Missouri, finding that the laws violated free speech guarantees in the U.S. Constitution.

Video game industry groups already have Diaz de la Portilla's bill in their sights.

"The Senator’s proposal is clearly unconstitutional," Gail Markels, senior vice president and general counsel of the Entertainment Software Association, said in a statement.

But lawmakers, who grab headlines for taking on the makers of violent games, are undaunted and U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton is leading a battle on the federal front.

Take-Two’s high-profile and best-selling "Grand Theft Auto" titles are a lightning rod for critics of violent games - but they are not alone.

The upcoming title "25 to Life" has been dubbed a "cop killer" game by U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat from New York. Delayed until next year, it was developed by Avalanche Studios and is being published by Eidos.

"50 Cent: Bulletproof" - inspired by the rapper and self-admitted former crack cocaine dealer 50 Cent - has attracted stinging criticism for its depictions of the underworld drug scene. Set for a November debut, the game’s developer is Genuine Games. Vivendi Universal Games has signed on as its distributor.

New Xbox Set for Slow Start

Microsoft Corp.’s new Xbox 360 video game console may get off to a slower start than initially expected, but the software giant’s plan to keep production steady and expectations low may help it win against rival Sony Corp., analysts said on Friday.

Current-generation Xbox sales have slowed ahead of the launch and Microsoft cautioned that early Xbox 360 sales would not be as high as expected, sparking an initial sell-off in the company’s shares.

The world’s largest software maker, in its quarterly earnings announcement on Thursday, said that it expects revenue in the last three months of 2005 to be $11.9 billion to $12.0 billion, slightly lower than the average analyst revenue forecast of $12.26 billion in the December quarter.

The shares have recovered after analysts noted that Microsoft would benefit from avoiding a big sales spike after the November 22 launch. Disgruntled customers were a problem for Sony when it launched its best-selling PlayStation 2 console in 2000.

"They want to have more of a constant supply," said Matt Rosoff, analyst at Directions on Microsoft, an independent research firm.

"They don’t want a huge spike in December and then a slump in January and February," Rosoff said, "They’re trying to avoid that."

Microsoft’s Chief Financial Officer Chris Liddell said there wouldn’t be a big initial spike and promised that the software giant would be able to ship between 4.5 and 5.5 million Xbox 360 consoles by the end of the business year to June 2006.

For the launch in a month, analysts expect Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft to ship between 1.5 million and 2 million consoles.

Microsoft is expected to have another factory producing Xbox 360 consoles in January, which will also increase supply ahead of Sony's spring launch of its next-generation PlayStation 3 console.

"It's much more important longer term to get production up and running," said Shawn Milne analyst at Friedman Billings Ramsey.

Console makers such as Nintendo Co. Ltd., Sony and Microsoft initially lose money on each console and make that up in game title royalties. Only after hardware costs come down do console makers reach break-even and make a profit on the machines.

"Given the business model for the consoles the more Microsoft can backload those hardware sales, the better it is for them financially," said Rosoff.

Most analysts agreed that Microsoft's fiscal year-end Xbox unit sales target was achievable, and most expect sales to reach 6 million.

"What's clear is that the annual numbers are fine for the Xbox," said Charles Di Bona, analyst at Sanford C. Bernstein & Co.

More important, said Milne, is for Microsoft to have a library of popular game titles for Xbox 360. Because there aren't any clear game hits to spur console sales, Microsoft won't need to ramp up product ion too aggressively, Milne said.

Electronic Arts Inc., the world's biggest video game publisher, is set to launch five new video game titles for the Xbox 360 launch, including "Need for Speed Most Wanted" and "FIFA 06: Road to FIFA World Cup".

But the third iteration of the "Halo" hit video game franchise developed by Microsoft's in-house gaming studio, which was credited for driving sales of the first Xbox after it debuted in 2001, isn't expected until at least the second half of 2006.

The three companies contracted by Microsoft to build the Xbox 360 are Flextronics International Ltd., Wistron Inc. and Celestica Inc. The Celestica plant is expected to come online in early 2006.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Caller ID for Your E-Mail

When the telephone rings, most people check the caller ID window before answering. If they see the name or phone number of a family member, friend, or business associate, the conversation begins without fear or inconvenience.

The telephone equipment cannot be tricked. Even when the caller ID window displays "out of area" or "name blocked" messages, telephone users do not have to worry about risking their identity or placing personal information at risk if they decline to answer.

But this is not the case with e-mail. Malefactors can easily spoof the sender’s address to trick the recipient into opening the message. Tricksters often make the subject line so inviting that the user cannot wait to click on a message that, once opened, might contain harmful computer code that installs ID-sniffing components or makes the computer susceptible to more unwanted e-mails, otherwise known as spam.

A solution to this problem might soon be available. The computer industry is fast-tracking a system called e-mail authentication, which will attempt to do for e-mail what caller ID does for telephone calls. E-mail authentication will assure the recipient that the sender actually is the person identified in the message header.

"I have no lack of confidence that, given time, it will be fully implemented, possibly within the next 18 months," said Tom Peterson, vice president of technology for IronPort Systems, an e-mail security firm.

In addtion to being an annoyance to consumers, receiving unwanted e-mail messages also is a worsening problem for businesses. But at the enterprise level, companies have I.T. departments and third-party equipment to detect spam and messages containing viruses and spyware.

Consumers, however, have neither the specialized equipment nor the training to keep all unwanted e-mail from entering their home computers. So the computer industry is aiming the fix at the sender level instead of at the consumer level.

When the solutions are broadly adopted by Internet service providers (ISPs), consumers will not have to do anything other than be aware of the process because ISPs and e-mail gateway services are responsible for making sure the mail they handle complies with the authentication policies.

However, even before these technologies come to market, consumers should understand the implications of opening mail that is suspect. Also, consumers who send larger-than-normal volumes of e-mail will run the risk of having their messages blocked or delayed by e-mail-authentication systems.

The crux of the authentication process is assigning a reputation score to the sender.

And just like CIOs of larger companies, entrepreneurs will have to know about reputation scores. Those who lack resources for I.T. consultants will have to reach out to their ISPs or third-party mail gateway services to ensure that their e-mail servers are not flagged with low or failing reputation scores, Peterson said.

"The e-mail authentication process puts the burden on the consumer’s ISP and the enterprise’s mail gateway," said George Bilbrey, vice president and general manager of delivery assurance solutions for Return Path. Outbound mailing applications make it easier for corporations to use the authentication standards.

Consumers and small business owners might have to rely on software that identifies the reasons why a message has failed to meet reputation

standards. For example, people who engage in more than casual e-mailing might be treated as an offending bulk e-mailer, Bilbrey said.

Peterson is encouraged by the progress in the deployment of e-mail authentication. But he expressed frustration that the adoption process is not moving more quickly.

Full deployment of authentication is being slowed, Peterson said, because some of the terminology is confusing and the industry has not yet solved some ambiguity issues. Part of that confusion stems from having two competing authentication systems: Domain Keys and Sender ID Framework.

Neither method attacks the cause of e-mail security issues - vulnerabilities in the e-mail infrastructure itself. But many industry leaders feel authentication will make a big dent in spoofing, phishing, fraud, and, of course, spam.

Domain Keys, created by Yahoo, requires a two-part verification process of the e-mail sender. The ISP or e-mail gateway service first authenticates the message sender, and then the message sender receives a favorable reputation score.

Sender ID Framework (SIDF), the second method, is a merger of proposals by Microsoft and the developer of Sender Policy Framework (SPF) that requires two levels of authentication before an e-mail message is delivered. The message originator first registers for inclusion on a list that confirms the sender’s Internet Protocol (IP) address and then must gain mail-server confirmation before sending.

Most security experts agree that the Domain Keys method is more rigorous because it involves using encryption. But it also takes longer to implement, making it easier for ISPs and mail gateway services to rely on the less secure Domain Keys method.

Neither e-mail authentication system is fully implemented just yet. So far, ISPs and popular e-mail services, such as America Online, Yahoo Mail, Google Gmail, and Microsoft’s Hotmail, have not done much to clue in users to the verification process.

One thing consumers can do right now in anticipation of these schemes being broadly adopted is to become more familiar with the elements of authenticated mail. One way to do this is to take a look at e-mail headers. Using Yahoo! Mail, for instance, an e-mail message’s full header display looks like this:

X-Apparently-To: username@yahoo.com via 208.190.38.220;

Sat, 01 Oct 2005 08:20:01 -0700

X-YahooFilteredBulk:70.103.249.130

X-Originating-IP:[70.103.249.130]

Return-Path:

Authentication-Results: mta112.mail.dcn.yahoo.com
from=piquaput.bigoar.net; domainkeys=neutral (no sig)

Received:from 70.103.249.130 (HELO
jocingistiregatundubekifi.ip-249-130.writhle.com) (70.103.249.130) by

mta112.mail.dcn.yahoo.com with SMTP;

Sat, 01 Oct 2005 08:20:00 -0700

From:"Foot Locker" Add to Address BookAdd to Address Book Add Mobile Alert

To: username@yahoo.com,

Subject:Sports Authority - Order Confirmation #501R-VBEC348

We altered some of the information to provide a fictional sample. Notice the authentication results line. It shows the actual sender. Compare this information to the from line below it.

See the difference? The sender appears to be a company whose name many consumers recognize, the athletic shoe retailer Foot Locker. But a close review of the full header details shows that the sender is not really that merchant.

Also, the Domain Keys reference line in the header information gives the sender a neutral rating.

Yahoo! Mail, Hotmail, Gmail, and other e-mail services are starting to attach authentication verification messages to e-mails that are from legitimate senders. For instance, on Yahoo! Mail a message from your bank might display a notification message in gray print at the bottom that verifies its authenticity.

Once e-mail authentication is fully deployed, consumers simply can delete e-mail messages that do not display a "proof of sender" seal.

OpenOffice 2.0 Has Its Eye on Microsoft

OpenOffice.org has officially rolled out the second version of its open-source productivity suite, and its backers are hoping that new features and support from government agencies will give the application the boost it needs to take on Microsoft Office.

The latest version, available for free, has been under development for two years and is compatible with Windows, Linux, and Solaris. The software takes advantage of open-source code developed by Sun Microsystems and first released in 2000 as the OpenOffice.org project. The code also is behind Sun’s StarOffice 8, which is sold commercially.

Recent attention from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts could give OpenOffice.org a push. State officials, arguing that documents should be based on open-source formats rather than proprietary ones, have become staunch supporters of OpenOffice.org and the OpenDocument format.

But OpenOffice.org needs to provide people with a compelling reason to make a shift from Microsoft, said Laura DiDio, a research fellow at Yankee Group.

"Microsoft has been doing everything it can to ensure that customers are comfortable with its product," DiDio says. "People need a reason to move to a new product. They don’t need a reason to stay with an old one."

New features of OpenOffice.org include a redesigned interface, a database application, and wider compatibility with Microsoft Office document formats and export-to-PDF components.

According to Didio, OpenOffice.org needs time to build up adequate technical maintenance, service, and support systems, especially when it is trying to replace a nearly ubiquitous product.

"Who do you call if you need a fix? With Microsoft you can call your hardware manufacturer, who will be familiar with the product and any known bugs and can then offer a fix," she said.

In the case of free software, DiDio said, warranties are not good and seldom improve. Governments might be looking at getting out from under Windows license agreements, but still they risk paying for similar services, she said.

"Governments who think they can cut costs by switching to Linux and open source distribution are not considering that this is a relatively immature market that does not have as many applications built for it and is without a structured mechanism through which users can receive help when the technology goes south."

New Web Software a Challenge to Microsoft

A quiet revolution is transforming life on the Internet: New, agile software now lets people quickly check flight options, see stock prices fluctuate and better manage their online photos and e-mail.

Such tools make computing less of a chore because they sit on distant Web servers and run over standard browsers. Users thus don’t have to worry about installing software or moving data when they switch computers.

And that could bode ill for Microsoft Corp. and its flagship Office suite, which packs together word processing, spreadsheets and other applications.

The threat comes in large part from Ajax, a set of Web development tools that speeds up Web applications by summoning snippets of data as needed instead of pulling entire Web pages over and over.

"It definitely supports a Microsoft exit strategy," said Alexei White, a product manager at Ajax developer eBusiness Applications Ltd. "I don’t think it can be a full replacement, but you could provide scaled-down alternatives to most Office products that will be sufficient for some users."

Ironically, Microsoft invented Ajax in the late 90s and has used it for years to power an online version of its popular Outlook e-mail program.

Ajax’s resurgence in recent months is thanks partly to its innovative use by Google Inc. to fundamentally change online mapping. Before, maps were static: Click on a left arrow, wait a few seconds as the Web page reloads and see the map shift slightly to the left. Repeat. Repeat again.

"It’s slow. It’s frustrating," said frequent map user Fred Wagner, a petroleum engineer in Houston. "We’re all getting spoiled with wanting things to happen."

So he sticks with Google Maps these days. There, he can drag the map over any which way and watch new areas fill in instantly. He can zoom in quickly using an Ajax slider.

No more World Wide Wait.

"Everybody went, ‘Ooooh, how did they do that?’" said Steve Yen, who runs a company developing an Ajax spreadsheet called Num Sum. "It turns out the technology’s been there for awhile."

Jesse James Garrett, an Adaptive Path LLC usability strategist who publicly coined the term ‘Ajax’ 10 days after Google Maps launched in February, said such examples "convinced a lot of Web designers to take another look at something they may have previously dismissed as experimental."

Also contributing are faster Internet connections, more powerful computers and better browsers able to handle Ajax, which is short for Asynchronous JavaScript and XML.

Consider e-mail.

Until recently, Web mail meant sending forms back and forth online. Check an item to delete and hit a button. A remote mail server receives instructions and responds with an entirely new page, which is missing only the one deleted item.

Enter Yahoo Inc. and an interface it is testing using technology from an Ajax pioneer it bought, Oddpost. Delete an item this time, and Ajax reconfigures the page immediately without waiting for a response.

Open a message to read, and the browser fetches only the message’s body - it already has the subject line and other header information and doesn’t have to waste time duplicating that data.

Yahoo also is developing an Ajax tool that instantly updates flight options as travelers narrow their choices of airports, airlines and travel times.

This summer, Time Warner Inc.’s America Online Inc. started using Ajax to let users rearrange, display and switch photo albums with fewer clicks.

And last week, Dow Jones & Co.’s MarketWatch began embedding news articles with stock quotes updated several times a second, blinking green and red as prices fluctuate.

"A Web page takes longer to load than that," said Jamie Thingelstad, MarketWatch’s chief technology officer. "Your computer would just be hung."

Microsoft, which uses Ajax in a new map offering and an upcoming Hotmail upgrade, is even starting to build new tools to promote Ajax development - even as it pushes a next-generation alternative.

The alternative technology, known as XAML, will permit even richer applications over browsers. Alas, unlike Ajax, it will run only on Microsoft’s Windows computers - no Macs, no Linux.

Startups, meantime, are embracing Ajax for Office-like tools. Such applications won’t replace Office but could find a niche - parents collaborating in a soccer league could jointly update a Num Sum spreadsheet with scores, while users too poor to buy Office or students always on the

go could compose a letter from anywhere using Writely word processor.

Scott Guthrie, who oversees the Microsoft Ajax tools called Atlas, believes Ajax has a future but not one at odds with Microsoft’s.

"Ultimately when you want to write a word processing document or manage a large spreadsheet, you are going to want the capabilities ... that are very difficult to provide on the Web today," Guthrie said.

Computer-intensive applications like Adobe Systems Inc.’s Photoshop image editor and high-end games won’t come to browsers anytime soon.

Even Google had to create desktop mapping software, called Google Earth and requiring a download, to permit 3-D and advanced features.

"Ajax cannot do everything," said Bret Taylor, who oversees Google’s mapping products. "Web applications have a way to go."

Other limitations are intentional. For security reasons, a browser cannot seamlessly access files or other programs on a computer. And, of course, Web applications require a persistent Internet connection - making work difficult on airplanes.

Usability expert Jakob Nielsen also worries that loss of productivity - a minute here, a minute there, multiplied by thousands of employees - will offset any savings in installation costs.

"When you do a lot of transactions, you want something that’s optimized for the transaction, not something optimized for information browsing," he said.

Among other criticisms, developer tools for Ajax aren’t as mature as those for one of its chief rivals, Macromedia Inc.’s Flash. And many Ajax programs don’t work well beyond Microsoft’s Internet Explorer and Mozilla’s Firefox browsers.

Yet Web-based applications are increasingly appealing at a time separate computers for home, work and travel are common and people get used to sharing calendars and other data with friends and relatives.

Ajax can make those experiences richer.

"There’s a lot of power sitting on that Web browser ... that people are just tapping into," said White of eBusiness Applications. Web developers "are beginning to push its limits in terms of creative uses and new applications."

eBay Fraudsters Jailed in Britain

Three Romanian fraudsters were jailed on Friday in London for their part in a worldwide fraud carried out via Internet auction house eBay, which netted at least 300,000 pounds ($533,000).

Some 3,000 victims from as far away as the United States and South Korea were snared by the trio in the electronic scam that involved crime bosses in Romania and which police fear continues to this day.

Judge Duncan Matheson sentenced Nicolae Cretanu, 30, to 3-1/2 years, his wife Adriana Cretanu 23, and their accomplice George Titar, 26, to 30 months each.

"This was on any showing a major and sophisticated fraud," Matheson told the Romanians as they stood in the dock at Middlesex Guildhall Crown Court.

"It exploited perceived weaknesses in the eBay system."

Between 2003 and 2005 the three had played a major role in the fraud which worked by operating bogus auctions for consumer goods ranging from scooters to military memorabilia.

Unsuspecting eBayers who tried to buy the fictitious goods were contacted and told their bid had been unsuccessful.

The disappointed bidders were then offered a second chance to buy similar goods outside the eBay system which provides some security from fraud.

Through a variety of aliases and using a number of forged Belgian passports the Romanians made hundreds of collections from Western Union money transfer outlets in London.

They kept about 30 percent of the money they stole, the rest they passed onto crime bosses in Romania.

Police officers are concerned the scam continues to be perpetuated by other individuals who have not been arrested and convicted. British police sources said in all likelihood the fraud had actually been far greater.

"The 300,000 pounds refers to the amount we could easily trace that they had defrauded people of, but it is likely the real amount was far higher," one officer said.

Study Finds Less Trusting Internet Users

As identity theft has grown, so has fear of being victimized through high-tech means. A new study finds some computer users are cutting back on time spent surfing the Internet. Some have also stopped buying altogether on the Web.

The report from Consumer Reports WebWatch finds nearly a third of those surveyed say they’ve reduced their overall Web site use.

Some 80 percent of Internet users say they’re at least somewhat concerned someone could steal their identity from personal information on the Internet. A majority of users asked say they’ve stopped giving out personal information on the Web and a quarter say they’ve stopped buying online.

The survey was of 1,500 U.S. Web users aged 18 and older.

Anti-Spyware Group Publishes Guidelines

A coalition of anti-spyware vendors and consumer groups published

guidelines Thursday to help consumers assess products designed to combat unwanted programs that sneak onto computers.

The Anti-Spyware Coalition released the guidelines for public comment and also updated a separate document that attempted to craft uniform definitions for "spyware" and "adware" in hopes of giving computer users more control over their machines.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Internet users have become more cautious online because of worries about spyware and adware, which can bombard users with pop-up ads and drain processing power to the point of rendering computers unusable.

Nearly half of adult online Americans have stopped visiting specific Web sites that they fear might infect them with such unwanted programs, and a quarter have ceased to use file-sharing software, which often comes bundled with adware.

In addition, 43 percent of Internet users say they’ve been hit with spyware, adware or both, with broadband users generally at greater risk.

The new guidelines from the coalition assign risk levels to various practices common with spyware and adware.

High-risk practices include installation without a user’s permission or knowledge, interference with competing programs, interception of e-mail and instant-messaging conversations and the display of ads without identifying the program that generated them.

Changing a browser’s home page or search engine setting is deemed a medium risk, while using data files called cookies to collect information is considered a low risk.

"Although all behaviors can be problematic if unauthorized, certain ones tend to have a greater impact and are treated with more severity than others," the guidelines say.

The idea is to agree on what practices consumers should worry most about. Within the general rankings, individual vendors still have leeway to assign their own weight to each behavior in deciding whether to quarantine or remove a program when detected.

The coalition also offers similar rankings on consent.

High marks go to programs that are distributed as separate downloads in clearly labeled packages, while those that try to bury what they do in legalese are given low ratings.

The commenting period on the guidelines ends Nov. 27.

The guidelines could encourage industry "best practices" that developers of adware and other programs could follow to avoid getting flagged by anti-spyware vendors.

However, the coalition has yet to set a timetable for defining such practices, said Ari Schwartz of the Center for Democracy and Technology, which led the coalition.

Nonetheless, Schwartz said, Thursday’s announcements represent a start toward long-term improvements in anti-spyware tools and consumer education.

"There won’t be as much gray area, and we’ll have more transparency out there," he said.

A separate coalition document defining spyware and related terms changed little from the draft issued in July.

The updated definitions document, reflecting nearly 400 comments received from the public, still flags as potential threats - an umbrella definition that includes spyware, adware and other categories such as "hijackers" and "cookies" - programs that:

_impair users’ control over their systems, including privacy and security;

_impair the use of system resources, including what programs are installed on their computers; and/or

_collect, use and distribute personal or otherwise sensitive information.

But by classifying "adware" as falling under the umbrella term, "Spyware and Other Potentially Unwanted Technologies," the coalition avoided a key dispute that has led to lawsuits by adware developers against anti-spyware vendors: Is adware a form of spyware or are the two separate?

Microsoft Takes On the Spam Kings

Faced with a growing number of more sophisticated Internet spammers, Microsoft is fighting back. The company is taking on those creating and exploiting "zombie" computers to deliver mass e-mail and launch phishing expeditions against unsuspecting computer users.

This company’s most recent effort was prompted by a test in which the software giant set up its own zombie machine and tracked all Internet traffic on it for 20 days last summer. During that time, the infected computer received some five million connection requests from spammers who used the machine to send out over 18 million spam messages advertising more than 13,000 individual Web sites.

The company had quarantined the machine, so these spam messages never went out to the Internet at large. With evidence gathered from this test, the company filed a federal lawsuit against 13 different spamming operations. The zombie investigation also gave the company new insight into how to combat spam and zombies, as well as how to fight the perpetrators in court.

Microsoft was able to uncover the Internet Protocol addresses of the computers sending spamming requests to the quarantined zombie, along with the addresses of the Web sites advertised in the spam. To prove these requests were not isolated examples, Microsoft compared the Web sites advertised in the quarantined zombie’s spam to those listed in spam in the MSN Hotmail trap accounts.

"Spammers are constantly changing their tactics, seeking new techniques to remain hidden as governments and individuals take steps to stop them," said Aaron Kornblum, an Internet safety enforcement attorney with Microsoft. "What they are doing now is sending e-mail through other people’s computers using proxy malware."

With hundreds of thousands of PCs running around the clock on broadband connections, spammers can use master lists of vulnerable machines to wreak havoc in short time, said Kornblum. "What we saw last summer was astonishing, and that was with only one computer. There are tens of millions of infected machines out there."

Consequently, Microsoft has joined forces with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Consumer Action to target those profiting from spam and educate consumers on how to protect themselves.

The FTC, a federal consumer-protection agency, has launched "Operation Spam Zombies" with 35 government partners from more than 20 countries to prod Internet service providers (ISPs) into improving their security.

And because zombie computers show few recognizable signs of infection, it is critical that users protect their systems. An ounce of prevention does indeed go a long way, and that includes installing a firewall, obtaining security updates (or turning on the Windows automatic-update feature), and using current antivirus and antispyware software.

"As always, people should be smart about opening any attachment or downloading files, and never open attachments from unknown sources," Kornblum said.

Coalition Outlines Strategies To Fight Spyware

The Anti-Spyware Coalition (ASC), an alliance of I.T. firms and public-interest groups, has finalized its definition of spyware, which will serve as the foundation for the group’s ongoing efforts to combat the growing Internet threat.

The first of those efforts is a "risk modeling" document that outlines the objective criteria antispyware vendors use to determine whether to identify a piece of software as spyware.

The document provides technical details about behaviors that make certain technologies risky, helps users better understand how the products that protect their computers work, and offers guidelines for security companies.

The ultimate objective is to create industry-wide best practices in fighting the spyware onslaught. To that end, the risk-modeling document is open for public comment until the end of November on the ASC Web site.

As Internet users struggle to maintain control over their computers, many find themselves in a cyclical battle against software that installs itself surreptitiously, opens security holes, and reinstalls itself after being deleted.

According to the ASC, the worst of these programs enable Internet criminals to obtain sensitive personal information through keylogging, while other spyware can be used to deliver Internet worms or launch denial-of-service attacks.

"The alliance wants to eliminate the confusion regarding spyware and other types of malware," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at Sophos, whose company is a member of the group. One issue to address is pop-up ads, which most people assume is spyware but typically is not, he

said.

"Adware is here to stay, and most of it is legitimate, but it has to be monitored and we need to develop a consensus throughout the industry on best practices for online advertising," said Cluley.

Spyware is becoming increasingly sophisticated, he noted, with practitioners installing worms without any action by the user and enticing people to visit Web sites that can exploit a browser vulnerability.

Computer and software makers are addressing the issue, and a growing antispyware industry has created an array of tools to help consumers identify and purge their computers of unwanted technology. "We need to understand the threats and raise awareness of what can be done to combat spyware," Cluley said.

This week the ASC has provided a formal definition of spyware, a glossary that offers clear definitions for terms commonly used in discussions about spyware, and a set of common industry guidelines that outlines the steps antispyware companies should take in responding to complaints from software vendors who contend that their products have been improperly flagged as spyware.

The ASC membership includes the Center for Democracy and Technology, Computer Associates, F-Secure, McAfee, Microsoft, Sophos, Symantec, Dell, Yahoo, and Hewlett-Packard.

Microsoft Chided Over Exclusive Music Idea

The federal judge overseeing Microsoft Corp.’s business practices scolded the company Wednesday over a proposal to force manufacturers to tether iPod-like devices to Microsoft’s own music player software.

Microsoft abandoned the idea after a competitor protested.

In a rare display of indignation, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly demanded an explanation from Microsoft’s lawyers and told them, "This should not be happening."

Legal and industry experts said Microsoft’s demands probably would have violated a landmark antitrust settlement the same judge approved in 2002 between the company and the Bush administration. The government and Microsoft disclosed details of the dispute in a court document last week.

The judge said Microsoft’s music-player proposal - even though it was abandoned 10 days later - "maybe indicates a chink in the compliance process." She made her remarks during a previously scheduled court hearing to review the adequacy of the settlement.

The disputed plan, part of a marketing campaign known as "easy start," would have affected portable music devices that compete with Apple Computer Inc.’s popular iPod. It would have precluded makers of those devices from distributing to consumers music software other than Microsoft’s own Windows Media Player, in exchange for Microsoft-supplied CDs.

"I do want to know how this happened," the judge said. "It seems to me at this late date, we should not have this occur." She did not indicate she

plans to punish Microsoft, but her comments were remarkable because she generally praises efforts by the company and government under the settlement.

A Microsoft lawyer, Charles "Rick" Rule, blamed the proposal on a newly hired, "lower-level business person" who did not understand the company's obligations under the antitrust settlement. The agreement constrains Microsoft's business practices through late 2007.

"This is an issue that Microsoft is concerned showed up," Rule said. He added that Microsoft regrets the proposal ever was sent to music-player manufacturers and that the company was "looking at it to make sure this is a lesson learned."

Responding to related complaints by Microsoft's competitors, the European Union ordered the company last year to sell a version of its dominant Windows operating system without the built-in media player software. Microsoft appealed the decision, which included a $613 million fine, but now sells a Windows version in Europe without its music software.

A Justice Department lawyer, Renata Hesse, said the government will discuss with Microsoft its legal training for employees about antitrust rules. The government previously said the incident was "unfortunate" but said lawyers decided to drop it because Microsoft pulled back.

"I think we, like you, believe it should not be happening at this point," Hesse told the judge.

Microsoft wants consumers to use its media software to transfer songs onto their portable music players from Internet subscription services, such as those from Napster Inc., RealNetworks Inc. and Yahoo! Inc. Each company currently offers its own media software.

Microsoft and others have struggled to match the runaway success of Apple's iPod player and iTunes music service.

Open Source Is Alive and Well with Commercial Developers

Open-source programming, a concept started nearly a decade ago by developers seeking an alternative marketing outlet, is becoming a staple for many software companies. Open-source code is now the basis of many popular products, some of which are distributed for free.

An open-source environment enables programmers to read, redistribute, and modify the source code for a piece of software. The Open Source Initiative (OSI) is a clearinghouse for license and marketing agreements involving open-source programs.

Alan Shimel, chief strategy officer for StillSecure, said his company is a huge supporter of open source. "This kind of software brings a much-needed grassroots movement that is pushing the software envelope. We try to leverage this in our products," he said.

The appeal of open source to software developers is that it allows them to improve, modify, or adopt according to their own needs, saving time that might be wasted on the paths traditionally used by commercial developers.

"The trend is for a company like ours to take an open-source engine and build a proprietary product around it," Shimel said.

Open-source products have spanned the three main software categories: operating systems, Internet browsers, and programming tools. Some of these products are so well known that computer users do not associate them with open-source technology.

Consider, for instance, the operating system Linux. It is found in devices from handheld computers to standard PCs. Linux is the most-used Unix-like operating system available, according to the OSI.

There are several versions of Linux, many of them modified and packaged with specific enhancements. Perhaps the most well-known version of Linux is Red Hat.

Other popular Linux-based programs are FreeBSD, OpenBSD, and NetBSD, which are all based on the Berkeley Systems Distribution of Unix developed at the University of California at Berkeley. Another BSD-based open-source project, Darwin, was developed for Apple Computer's OS X.

Open-source coding is built into many of the router boxes and root Domain Name Servers (DNS) that power the Internet. A majority of these programs are rooted in a version of BSD or Linux. BIND is the open-source software providing the DNS service for the Internet.

Open-source programs also are found running on top of many operating systems. The open-source based Apache, for instance, runs over half of the world's Web servers.

One prominent e-mail delivery system, Sendmail, is an open-source product. Even Mozilla Organization's Firefox Web browser, which has eroded more than 10-percent of Microsoft's Internet Explorer user base, is open-source programming.

Many companies use OpenSSL to handle encrypted communications over the Internet. The bulk of TCP/IP DNS, SSL, and e-mail servers are products drawn from open-source coding as well. The most popular open-source programming languages for Internet applications include Perl, Zope, Python, Ruby, and Tcl/Tk.

GNU and tools such as GCC, Make, Autoconf, and Automake are among the most flexible and popular open-source compilers developed. OSI claims most programmers use them as their primary development tools.

Shimel stressed the distinction between open source and open standards: The former is the use of nonproprietary programming available for anyone, while the latter is viewed best as an industry-wide coding practice.

Using open standards enables program components to communicate with other programs, he said. Examples of open-standard, or industry-recognized programming, include XML, Java, and PHP.

Shimel noted that using open-source products is not about getting something for nothing. "It's about getting interoperability," he said.

"Unlike commercial software, there is no one owner who controls the program. With open-source programming, more than one person is involved with the program's concept," he said.

That has advantages, Shimel said. Buying a commercial product always comes with the risk of the company going out of business, but there is less of a risk with open source because the code is developed by a community of programmers who keep the product intact, he said.

Internet Body in Settlement With VeriSign

The Internet's key oversight agency said Monday it had tentatively agreed to settle a longstanding legal dispute with VeriSign Inc., a company that exerts significant control over how people find Web sites and send e-mail.

VeriSign's accord with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers could pave the way for the revival - after an outside review - of a controversial search service the company created in late 2003 for guiding Internet users who mistype Web addresses.

After VeriSign launched the service, called Site Finder, for ".com" and ".net" names, critics complained that it interfered with spam filters and other key Internet tools while giving VeriSign an unfair competitive advantage in search.

With Site Finder, Web surfers who entered addresses that don't exist got, instead of an error message, suggestions on where they might have wanted to go. VeriSign considered that a benefit for users but because VeriSign sometimes got money for directing traffic to those sites critics termed the service an abuse of power.

VeriSign controls the computers with master lists of domain name suffixes," such as ".com." It also runs the core directories for the two most popular suffixes, ".com" and ".net." As a result, Internet computers intersect with VeriSign's millions of times daily to find out how to route e-mail and other traffic.

Under pressure from ICANN, VeriSign agreed to suspend Site Finder shortly after it was introduced. The company sued ICANN months later, arguing that the agency's actions, including the decision on Site Finder, impeded VeriSign's efforts to offer new, moneymaking services.

ICANN later countersued.

The proposed settlement, which ICANN's board unanimously agreed Monday to send to the Internet community for public comment, revises the definition of "registry service" so that Site Finder is clearly covered and thus requires prior ICANN approval.

It also establishes a formal review process for new services, such as Site Finder, in which ICANN would have 90 days to address any security, stability and competitive concerns.

VeriSign has in the past complained that ICANN takes too long to make decisions and is often inconsistent when it does.

Any settlement needs final approval from the board of both ICANN and VeriSign along with the Commerce Department, which in 1998 gave ICANN its authority to oversee domain names and other Internet addressing policies.

The settlement terms would be included in a revised contract agreement for

the ".com" suffix. Earlier this year, VeriSign won a contract extension for ".net," so similar terms already were included there.

As part of the deal, the ".com" contract scheduled to expire in 2007 would be extended to 2012.

Although the settlement does not call for any monetary damages, ICANN chief executive Paul Twomey said the agency would receive contributions from VeriSign to cover legal and other fees, starting with an initial payment of $1.25 million. He said legal costs reached several million dollars.

VeriSign, however, termed the payments a surcharge and said it would merely be passing on to ICANN a 37-cents-per-name fee imposed on resellers on domain names.

Mark McLaughlin, general manager of VeriSign's naming and directory services unit, said the company got "business clarity on what new services could be introduced and how it could be introduced."

The company said it was reluctant to make major investments without knowing it could quickly offer new services to recoup costs.

For ICANN and the Internet community, Twomey said, "this is a framework and an agreement that will ensure no more ... unilateral controversial introduction of registry services."

Michael D. Gallagher, assistant secretary for communications and information at the Commerce Department, termed the proposed deal "a positive step towards the smooth future management of the domain."

McLaughlin said VeriSign has not yet made any decisions on if and when it would seek ICANN's approval for Site Finder.

"The market has moved substantially in the two-plus years since we had the service in the market," he said. "We have to go back and look at the viability of it."

VeriSign was silent on what other services it was considering, but just this month, it acquired two companies involved with aggregating and sorting online news and Web journals and with notifying users about them.

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